



J.E. Rhoads & Sons, Inc. records 0290

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Manuscripts and Archives

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Summary Information

Repository:	Manuscripts and Archives
Creator:	J.E. Rhoads & Sons, Inc
Title:	J.E. Rhoads & Sons, Inc. records
ID:	0290
Date [inclusive]:	1699-1969
Physical Description:	213 Linear Feet
Language of the Material:	English .
Abstract:	The leather manufacturing firm of J.E. Rhoads & Sons grew out of an eighteenth-century tanning operation on the Rhoads family homestead in Marple, Chester County (now Delaware County), Pa. Records cover the entire history of the firm from the 1720s through the 1960s. There is also substantial information on trade organizations in the leather industry and on members of the Rhoads family.

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Historical Note

The leather manufacturing firm of J.E. Rhoads & Sons grew out of an eighteenth-century tanning operation on the Rhoads family homestead in Marple, Chester County (now Delaware County), Pa. The early business was a combination of farming, tanning, and the manufacture of scythe stones. In 1868 Jonathan E. Rhoads moved the tannery to Wilmington, Del., and in 1877 he formed a partnership with Thomas McComb under the style of Rhoads & McComb. The firm gradually shifted its emphasis from the tanning of sole and harness leather to the manufacture of leather belting. In 1887 Rhoads & McComb was dissolved, and John B. Rhoads was brought into the business, which became J.E. Rhoads & Son. His brothers, George A. Rhoads and William E. Rhoads, joined the firm in 1888 and 1894. By the 1890s the firm was concentrating on tannate belting. In 1889 it opened its first Philadelphia store, and it moved its head office to that city in 1897. Branch stores were opened in New York (1906), Atlanta (1923), and Cleveland (1927). Both the factory and corporate headquarters were located in Wilmington, Del., until 1977 when they were moved to suburban New Castle County. The firm was incorporated in Delaware as J. E. Rhoads & Sons, Inc., in 1965.

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Scope and Content

Records cover the entire history of the firm from the 1720s through the 1960s. There is also substantial information on trade organizations in the leather industry and on members of the Rhoads family.

Administrative records include minutes of managers' meetings (1919-1958), of department heads meetings (1921-1944), notes of firm meetings (1939-1949), and minutes and correspondence of the general works council (1936-1954).

Accounts, though incomplete, include the oldest day book of the firm (1727-1738) and the general ledgers from 1851 to 1955. There are also auditor's reports (1928-1955), tax records (1937-1958), and cost accounting materials including statements and budgets (1928-1959). There is a chart of financial performance (1888-1909) and appraisals of property in Philadelphia, Wilmington, and at regional offices.

Purchasing and receiving records include a purchase register (1898-1901), inventories, and leather samples.

Production records include time books (1900-1908) and fragmentary wage records (1887-1932). Payrolls are available for the office staff and sales dept.

Sales records include consignment papers (1899-1902), trade catalogs, agreements with salesmen (1932-1963), sales analyses (1916-1960), graphs and charts, memos, notebooks with customers' addresses, and testimonials from customers. There is a large group of training literature salesmen and agent advertisers from the 1920s giving instructions in selling methods, how to write advertisements, and how to set up product displays.

Advertising records include scrapbooks of company advertising and advertisements from competitors.

The loose correspondence includes papers on the purchase of the Wilmington tannery, notes of visits to other tanneries, on expenses, the number of hides received, and tanning formulas. There is also a circular on employee relations (1903) and correspondence relating to the Leather Belting Exchange.

Labor and personnel records include employee personnel files for the main office staff (1904-1964). There is important coverage of negotiations with the United Fur and Leather Workers Union (CIO), union contracts, grievances, and records of collective bargaining from the 1940s and 1950s.

The miscellany includes material relating to the firm's 250th and 275th anniversaries, a ledger of the Darby Mill in Marple, Pa., recording the sale of scythe stones (1865-1870), and a list of leather dealers in New York, Boston, Newark, N.J., Hartford, Providence, and Pawtucket with credit ratings (1868). There is also a series of 44 lessons published by the Plastic Industries Technical Institute in 1941, an early primer on plastics theory and applications.

Printed material includes samples of trade catalogues, manuals, and technical papers on leather belting, footgear, shoelaces, and tanning. There are scattered issues of *Rhoadside News*, an employee magazine

(1927-1937) and a testimonial and article from Admiral Richard E. Byrd regarding the use of tannate shoelaces on his polar expeditions.

The general office files are the main correspondence file from the Wilmington plant (1900-1950s) and are arranged alphabetically by subject. It covers most areas of management concern, including production, purchases, sales, labor relations, testing, patents, and the Rhoads Employees' Relief Association. There is a 1938 survey of the foreign leather industry. There is documentation on the activities of many trade associations, including the Leather Belting Exchange, the National Association of Leather Belting Manufacturers, the American Leather Belting Association, the Power Transmission Council, and the Tanners' Council of America.

The family materials cover the Rhoads family from 1699 to the 1950s. They include a will and deed of John Rhoads, estate papers of Joseph Rhoads (1751), notes on the Rhoads family in England, and letters of Jonathan E. Rhoads and his wife, Rebecca, to their children. There is correspondence covering both business and personal matters for the sons and grandsons of Jonathan E. Rhoads who were partners and officers in the firm.

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Arrangement

Series I. Administrative records; Series II. Accounts; Series III. Purchasing and receiving records; Series IV. Production records; Series V. Sales records; Series VI. Advertising books; Series VII. Loose correspondence and memoranda; Series VIII. Personnel and labor records; Series IX. Company histories; Series X. Miscellany; Series XI. Printed material; Series XII. General office files; Series XIII. Research and product testing records; Series XIV. Rhoads family material; Series XV. Photographs.

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

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Related Materials

Separated Material

J.E. Rhoads & Sons, Inc. photographs (Accession), Audiovisual Collections and Digital Initiatives Department, Hagley Museum and Library

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Controlled Access Headings

- Leather industry and trade
- Leather -- Research.
- Trade associations.
- Tanning
- Sales promotion
- Leather workers
- Hides and skins industry
- Belts and belting
- Leather -- Sample books.
- Plastics industry and trade
- Rhoads, Joseph, 1680-1732
- Rhoads, Jonathan E. (Jonathan Evans), 1830-1914
- Rhoads, John, 1639-1701
- Rhoads, John B. (John Biddle), 1865-1911
- Rhoads, Rebecca Garrett, 1830-1905
- Rhoads, Philip G. (Philip Garrett)
- Rhoads, Joseph, 1787-1861
- Rhoads & McComb
- National Association of Leather Belting Manufacturers
- Rhoads, Richard H. (Richard Harlan), 1909-2005
- McComb, Thomas
- Rhoads, J. Edgar (Joseph Edgar), 1883-1981
- Rhoads, George A. (George Ashbridge)
- Rhoads, George A. (George Ashbridge), 1860-1937
- Rhoads family
- Congress of Industrial Organizations (U.S.)

- J.E. Rhoads & Son
- Lincoln family
- Lincoln, Mordecai, 1686-1736
- J.E. Rhoads & Sons
- Leather Belting Exchange
- American Leather Belting Association
- Byrd, Richard Evelyn, 1888-1957
- Rhoads, William E. (William Evans), 1870-1945
- Tanners' Council of America
- United Fur and Leather Workers Union
- United States. National War Labor Board (1942-1945)
- Weden, Grace Rhoads